

Testimony of the Middletown Public School Preschool Program

Dawn Abrahamson, Preschool Coordinator

Before the Appropriations Committee

February 16, 2016

Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Dawn Abrahamson and I am the Preschool Coordinator for the Middletown Public School Preschool Program; a program that is funded with School Readiness dollars. Of the 120 children we serve, 60 of our students are in school readiness funded slots. The population of children we provide for is diverse, with children coming from many different cultural and economic backgrounds. Among our non-school readiness student population are 56 identified special education students. The children holding school readiness slots serve as role models for the students with special needs, allowing Middletown Public Schools to fully include 100% of our Special Education Preschool Students in integrated preschool classrooms. If we lose School Readiness funding, we will need to reconsider this model. We would be losing the funding that allows us to educate preschool aged students that currently hold School Readiness Slots. We also would be losing the funding that allows us to maintain the high staff to student ratio that makes it possible to serve all students with Special Needs in an integrated learning environment.

I am writing to ask you to please reconsider the 12 million dollar cut to the Office of Early Childhood, and also oppose the block grant approach being proposed by the Governor. It removes transparency from the State budget and leaves School Readiness funded *Public School* Preschool Programs across the state of Connecticut, without the funding to offer a quality preschool experience to students that do not have special needs.

Please protect the Quality Enhancement funding given to the Middletown community. The funds provide 20 hours of valuable free trainings 10 which helps our teachers and paraprofessionals obtain the mandated professional development (an unfunded mandate). These funds also help to provide onsite coaching for teachers in our program, educating them on NAEYC mandated requirements, learning experience plans, and necessary general early childhood best practices. These services are invaluable and we can't duplicate them on our already underfunded budget.

As a Public School Preschool Program, we are proud of all we are able to provide for children and families, given the School Readiness funding we receive. A bulk of the funding we receive from School Readiness goes toward bus transportation for qualifying families (based on income). We are the only preschool program in Middletown that provides transportation. Out of 120 students, 112 are offered door to door transportation at no cost to the family. Without School Readiness funding, we face the reality that we may not be able to offer transportation for preschool students. This will therefore limit the opportunity for children, in families without transportation, to attend preschool. Please do not take these valuable services away from our community. Please do not put us in the position where we need to close classrooms, lay off staff, and worst of all, leave families without access to preschool for their children.

At one time sending your child to preschool was considered a “*gift*”. Parents sent their children to preschool to enrich their lives and give them experience outside of the home. With the rigorous demands and expectations of The Kindergarten Common Core, attending preschool is now a necessity. No longer are the days when a child is able to be successful in the rigorous Kindergarten Curriculum without having a high-quality preschool experience. Please do not take this opportunity away from the children of Middletown. Please do not take this opportunity away from the children of Connecticut.

Please reconsider cutting any funds from School Readiness or Quality Enhancement Funds.

Cordially,
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